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SUBJECT: Special Media Reaction: Editorial Reaction to December 19 Statement by the Tokyo Donors Conference Co-Chairs

¶11. (U) Summary: The statement by the Tokyo Donors Conference Co-chairs after their December 19 meeting in Brussels sparked a considerable amount of editorial comment in the English and Sinhala press in the week following its December 21 release in Colombo. Editorialists analyzed the statement amidst continued LTTE violence against Security Forces and the murder of a senior pro-Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) Tamil National Alliance (TNA) Member of Parliament Joseph Pararajasingham early Christmas morning. Many editorialists called upon the Co-chairs to put more force behind their words. Others lamented the Tigers' unwillingness to heed the warnings of the international community. End Summary.

¶12. (U) Immediately following the release of the December 19 Co-Chairs' statement, government-owned newspapers, including the English Daily News, Sinhala Dinamina, and Tamil Thinakkural (12/22) called the statement "widely welcomed" in similar editorials before going on to chastise the LTTE for "splitting hairs" over the choice of a venue for peace talks. In Saturday's Daily News (12/24), however, veteran journalist and newly appointed media advisor to President Rajapaksa, Lucien Rajakarunanayake, took a more critical view of the Co-chairs' statement. He praised the Co-Chairs' commendation of the Muslim community's restraint despite provocation, but contended the LTTE had blinded the Co-chairs in regard to paramilitaries. By the terms of the Ceasefire agreement, Rajakarunanayake argued, paramilitary groups "were members of the EPDP [Eelam People's Democratic Party led by Minister Douglas Devananda], the EPLF [Eelam People's Republican Liberation Front], and PLOTE [People's Liberation Organization of Tamil Eelam]. They surrendered their arms just one month after the signing of the CFA... The paramilitary group the LTTE refers to is its own rebel faction led by Karuna Amman. This is a problem of the LTTE. It is not a creation of the Government which has repeatedly said it does not support them nor act in collusion with them."

¶13. (U) Another excerpt of Lucien Rajakarunanayake's op-ed in the government-owned Daily News (12/24) follows: "It's obvious that the Co-Chairs are having a tough time getting their act right in the Sri Lankan context... Apart from passing reference welcoming the 'President's aim to develop a credible political platform in the South to take the peace process forward,' it has nothing to say on the tremendous patience shown by the President and his government in the face of grave provocations by the LTTE." Rajakarunanayake goes on to analyze the statement in terms of its meaning to the LTTE, writing, "Wordy warnings mean nothing to the LTTE... Those who seek to guide Sri Lanka toward a durable peace demonstrate... they have swallowed the LTTE's propaganda about paramilitary groups hook, line and sinker. They are only repeating what the LTTE keeps on saying ad nauseam today, to justify their continued violence and contempt for the CFA."

¶14. (U) Mainstream independent media, including the Daily Mirror and its sister Sinhala paper Lankadeepa (12/23), contended the peace process is the responsibility of Sri Lankans despite helpful words from the Co-chairs. The Daily Mirror editor (12/23) noted his own paper's headline on December 21, "Co-chairs growl at Tigers," contending, "The Co-chairs have not stopped at warning of grave consequences if they [the LTTE] persist in defying the peace effort. They have also urged the government to take immediate steps to end the activities of paramilitary groups in the region... Whatever threats and warnings given by the Co-chairs, this country's salvation lies in our own hands."

¶15. (U) Sinhala nationalist media in both English and Sinhala took a more cynical view of the Co-chairs' statement. The independent Island and its sister paper, Sinhala Divaina, banting, "There is a sucker born every minute," argued: "The Co-chairs told the outfit [LTTE] to choose between eschewing violence and serious consequences. As if to slap the much venerated four-some slap-bang on the face, the LTTE stepped up its violence spree in Jaffna..."

How is it that a small terror group in a tiny island has the courage to fly in the face of their warnings while even terror Czars like bin Laden are running for dear life? Is it due to some unknown military capability the LTTE has acquired? Nay! They are convinced beyond an iota of a doubt the warnings won't be carried out... And the international community has taken the terror abhorring Sri Lankans for a set of suckers. Else, how can Britain continue to keep LTTE spokesman Anton Balasingham in London and allow him disseminate terror and raise funds, despite a ban? How can the US allow former President Bill Clinton to meet LTTE fronts in Sri Lanka? The US may claim he is representing the UN and the US government has nothing to do with his visits. But will the US allow him to shake hands with al Qaeda leaders or sympathizers anywhere in the world? The Co-chairs stand accused of not doing enough to coerce the LTTE into desisting from terror, and coming back to the negotiating table."

16. (U) Independent Tamil and pro-LTTE media declined to editorialize on the Co-chairs' statement other than occasional references to the call for the government to take on paramilitary groups.

17. (SBU) Comment: Government-owned and independent media unsurprisingly chose different elements of the Co-chairs' involvement on which to harp. Government-owned media argued that the Co-chairs had fallen for LTTE propaganda by calling for the government to disarm paramilitary groups, repeatedly denying any collusion with anti-LTTE Tamil parties. The Sinhala nationalist media, often xenophobic, expressed contempt for what it viewed as another powerless statement from the international community. Reflecting its often-repeated argument that hypocritical foreign envoys must give the Tigers a powerful slap, the Sinhala nationalist press questioned the commitment of the U.S. and Britain to fighting, in not so many words, non-Islamic terrorist groups. Despite these differing viewpoints, however, editorialist basically expressed concern, either with sadness or cynicism, that the LTTE have thus far ignored the Co-chairs' warnings despite the international community's basic good will. End Comment.

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